

# ***Iowa Outdoors***

## **Iowa Department of Natural Resources**

### **www.iowadnr.com**

Editor: Mick Klemesrud, 515/281-8653  
[mick.klemesrud@dnr.state.ia.us](mailto:mick.klemesrud@dnr.state.ia.us)

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**Feb. 24, 2004**

1. Hunter Education and More – by Joe Wilkinson
2. Officials to Score Trophy Deer Antlers March 20
3. Shrubs Vital in Creating Wildlife Habitat
4. FINAL Ice Fishing Report

## **HUNTER EDUCATION AND MORE**

By Joe Wilkinson

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

Iowa's most popular hunting seasons have closed. See a rooster pheasant now, and you're wondering if he can forage in all the snow. Most whitetail bucks have dropped their antlers. Just the time then, to think about....more hunting. Well, specifically; hunter education.

Each year, about 12,000 people take the course in Iowa; most in late summer or early fall, to certify hunters prior to upland game and deer seasons. With growing interest in spring turkey seasons, though, a 'bumper crop' of classes comes through in late February, March and early April. Anyone born in or later than 1967 must pass a hunter education course in order to purchase a hunting license.

"Spring is an opportune time to get into a course," offers Rod Slings, recreation safety coordinator for the Department of Natural Resources. "The classes don't fill as fast as when they are announced in the fall. Also, it takes in those hunters who will be in the spring turkey woods, but maybe haven't taken the course yet."

A typical student is a teenager; maybe one who turns 16 soon and will need to buy a license, instead of hunting under Dad or Mom's supervision. However, students run from about 11 or 12 years of age on up. Occasionally, a parent sticks around and takes the 10 hours of instruction, too. I've done that twice; the first, 'official' time with my older daughter about seven years ago and then again with the younger one, four summers back. It's routine for a few 19 or 20-somethings to sit through the sessions, especially in college communities. I've talked with kids who came to college here from the Chicago area or other out of state location and found out they need the course, so they can go

home for the weekend, or Thanksgiving, with an Iowa roommate or friend to hunt their land.

Dates and locations are still publicized at sporting goods stores, in school calendars and on store bulletin boards, but the DNR's web site ([www.iowadnr.com](http://www.iowadnr.com), click on hunter education and follow prompts to dates, locations) is fast becoming a clearing house for hunter ed students looking for a course. Often, the nearest one conflicts with school activities, jobs or family vacations. The website shows classes in adjoining counties or future months, to allow students to schedule around conflicts. Some classes begin and end over a weekend; say a full day Saturday and a half-day on Sunday. Others are stretched over several evenings, with shorter hours. While many are currently posted, more will fill the web pages after Iowa's 1,800 volunteer instructors complete their training workshops in March.

The International Hunter Education Association is also venturing on to the 'Net. Several on-line classes were offered across Iowa last year and are becoming popular with adults trying to squeeze the course into a too-tight schedule. With completion of online course work and a passing score on a pre-test, student can conclude instruction with a three to five hour course; set to fit in with job, home and other time conflicts. The DNR is looking for more Instructor Teams for the new look class.

"The course offers basic safety instruction," emphasizes Slings. "It's been proven that hunter education has reduced the number of hunting incidents since it became mandatory in 1983." Still, in a sport where one accident is too many, he sees room for continued improvement.

### **Hunter Education Facts, Figures**

\* Hunting incidents--injuries, deaths, property damage--did rise in 2003 (to 41, with two deaths) over the prior year (about 25 incidents). Slings attributes that to an increase in the number of turkey and deer hunters. Still, current figures remain far below the 1960s and '70s. A three year period in the mid '60s shows 120 to 140 incidents per year, with upwards of 20 annual fatalities!

\*As you might expect, October through December and Saturday and Sunday were the peak periods for hunting incidents

\*In 11 of 20 *intentional* firing incidents, the victim was out of the sight of the shooter. In 15 of 20 *unintentional* incidents, the cause listed is the shooter stumbling, loading/unloading the firearm, or careless handling or placement of the gun.

\*Either deer or pheasants were the game being hunted in 30 of the 41 incidents in 2003. Blaze orange apparel was being worn in 23 of the cases.

\*With electronic licensing now, a lost or damaged hunter education card can be replaced at any license vendor. The cost is \$3.50 for the duplicate card.

### **Trophy Rack, or Just Curious? Time to Score Whitetail Antlers**

Whether it's a rack from this past season, or that mounted deer head in Grandpa's attic, deer hunters are usually curious about how their antlers 'score'. You can get that large rack measured late this month by a certified scorer to determine whether you have a trophy whitetail, or just a set of antlers to remind you of the hunt.

Don Pfeiffer, certified by Iowa Trophy Deer, Boone and Crockett, Pope and Young and the Longhunter Society, will offer free rack measuring at the DNR Southeast District Office, at Lake Darling State Park, February 25-26. Pfeiffer will be scoring from noon until 8 p.m. each day. Appointments will be honored until 4:30, by calling 319 694-2430. Otherwise, measurements will be done on a first come, first served basis. Each set of antlers takes about 20 minutes to be measured. Pfeiffer can also answer questions about how and which categories you might enter; depending on antler score, method of kill and the hunter's preference.

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### **OFFICIALS TO SCORE TROPHY DEER ANTLERS MARCH 20**

MORAVIA – The Iowa Department of Natural Resources is hosting a trophy deer antler measuring seminar at the Lake Rathbun Fish Hatchery on March 20. Official scorers from the Boone and Crockett, Pope and Young, and the DNR will be present from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. to officially score antlers. All eligible antlers will be entered into the record book. The event is open to anyone who would like their deer antlers officially scored.

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### **SHRUBS VITAL IN CREATING WILDLIFE HABITAT**

DES MOINES - Whether creating a wildlife haven in the backyard or wild turkey habitat on an acreage, it takes a variety of plantings to build a multi-layered habitat suitable to a variety of animal species.

A mix of large trees such as evergreens to hardy and native shrubs such as chokecherry to provide the habitat desired, said John Walkowiak, forestry bureau chief of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources. "Woody and native shrubs play a key role in this providing habitat for many native species of wildlife, and are vital to a successful conservation planting," Walkowiak said.

Broadleaf shrubs such as wild plum, ninebark, buttonbush, gray dogwood and hazelnut along with small trees such as serviceberry offer dense, low-hanging branches

that provide winter cover for wildlife, but most importantly, provide an excellent food source.

“Shrubs and small trees such as Chokecherry, Wild plum, Ninebark, Chokecherry, High bush Cranberry and Grey Dogwood Cherry provide good food and cover for Iowa native wildlife,” he said.

Shrub plantings also offer wildlife and pest control benefits to an Iowa landowner. In a comparison between a shrub and a sod fence row, there were more than 20,000 crop-damaging insects and four times as many damaging animals per mile in the sod fence row than in the shrub fence row.

The State Forest Nursery in Ames has a good supply of native shrubs and small trees perfect for wildlife habitat projects – whether it is for the backyard, a small acreage or large planting. Call 800-865-2477 or visit [www.iowatreeplanting.com](http://www.iowatreeplanting.com) for more information.

**For more information, contact Walkowiak at 515-242-5966.**

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## ***IOWA FISHING REPORT***

**For the week of February 24, 2004**

**[www.iowadnr.com](http://www.iowadnr.com)**

**This is the FINAL ice fishing report. Weekly fishing reports will resume April 5. Ice conditions continue to vary greatly across the state.**

### **Northwest**

Walleye, northern pike and muskie seasons are now closed on Sprit Lake, East Okoboji and West Okoboji in Dickinson County.

**Spirit Lake** (Dickinson): Caution: The snow is deep and many people are getting stuck when trying to get on the lake. Yellow perch fishing has been kind of slow. Anglers are catching some perch on both sides of Big Stoney Point, the North Grade, and off Crandall's Beach using pilkees and jigs tipped minnows and wigglers. Crappie fishing out from Angler's Bay resort is still pretty good. Use smaller jigs tipped with wax worms or minnows. A few bluegills are being caught in the same area as the crappies using small jigs and wax worms.

**West Okoboji** (Dickinson): Caution: There is open water at the Gull Point area and at the north end of the lake. Anglers continue to catch bluegills and crappies in 8 to 10 feet of water in Miller's Bay. Bluegills are also being caught at Spencer Beach and a few at Smith's Bay by anglers fishing close to shore. Pocahontas Point is another area to try for bluegills. Yellow perch are being caught between Gull Point and Eagle Point at Spencer Beach in 10 to 12 feet of water.

**Arrowhead Lake** (Sac): Bluegill fishing is fair throughout the lake. Some sorting is required to get 7 to 8-inch fish.

**Storm Lake** (Buena Vista): Anglers are catching a few walleyes on the north shore by the college. Fishing is better in the late afternoon and early evening.

**Little Clear Lake** (Pocahontas): Yellow perch fishing is spotty. Use minnows for the best action. Perch up to 12 inches are available.

**Brushy Creek** (Webster): Ice fishing is slow throughout the lake. Anglers are catching a few sunfish, crappies and walleyes. The ice on the main part of the lake is only 3 to 4 inches thick. There is a heavy blanket of snow on the lake.

**Clear Lake** (Cerro Gordo): Yellow bass fishing has slowed. Yellows are being caught around the Island at sunset. Use minnows and jigging spoons for the best action. Walleyes are occasionally being caught around the rock reefs and the east shoreline in 10 to 13 feet of water.

**Rice Lake** (Winnebago/Worth): Yellow perch are hitting on minnows and small jigs. The perch are on the small side, so sorting is required. A few northern pike, in the 2 to 5-pound range, are being caught while fishing for perch.

**For more information on fishing in northwest Iowa, call the regional office in Spirit Lake at (712) 336-1840.**

### **Southwest**

Warmer weather has made ice fishing conditions extremely dangerous on southwest Iowa lakes. The fishing is the same but the ice is poor on small bodies of water. By late this week conditions will be marginal at best.

**Three Mile** (Union): Ice varies from 8 to 12 inches and has water on the ice but is solid otherwise. Fishing is good for bluegill and crappies in the upper end and around creek channel trees in the mid portion of the lake. Walleye fishing is good on the rock piles on old roadbed.

**Twelve Mile** (Union): Fishing is good for crappies.

**Green Valley** (Union): Ice thickness varies from 6 to 10 inches. Some bluegill and crappies are being caught.

**Icaria** (Adams): Anglers are catching channel catfish.

**Little River** (Decatur): Fishing is good for walleye in the mid lake creek channel, bluegills in the trees, and crappies in the mid and lower portions of the lake.

**Big Creek** (Polk): Bluegill fishing is fair to good during the day using teardrops and wax worms in the Lost Lake area near the spillway. Crappie fishing has been good late in the day in the Lost Lake area and in the main lake in deeper water, up to 30 feet deep, using rocker jigs and minnows. Crappies have been from 8 to 14 inches.

**Lake Ahquabi** (Warren): Bluegill fishing is fair and crappie fishing slow. The best fishing is early morning and late afternoon using teardrops and wax worms. A few channel catfish have been reported.

**Hooper Lake** (Warren): Bluegill and crappie fishing is fair to good in early morning and late afternoon. Try jigs and wax worms over brush and trees.

**Don Williams** (Boone): Crappie fishing has been good along the eastern part of the lake in the afternoon. Bluegill fishing is fair to good with jigs and wax worms.

**Hickory Grove** (Story): Bluegill fishing has picked up and anglers are reporting some fair to good fishing.

**Rock Creek Lake** (Jasper): Crappie fishing is slow to fair using jigs and wax worms.

**Farm ponds:** Fishing is best on ponds. Ice conditions are generally good. Best fishing is for bluegill with some crappie in the larger ponds.

**Viking** (Montgomery): Ice thickness varies from 6 to 9 inches. Anglers are catching bluegills and yellow bass, better toward evening.

**Greenfield** (Adair): Ice thickness varies from 5 to 7 inches. There are 3 areas of open water: at end of fishing jetty north of the boat ramp, the boat ramp, and around northeast shoreline. Use caution and check ice thickness and conditions often, avoid areas near open water. Anglers are catching 6 to 8 inch bluegills.

**Mormon Trail** (Adair): Ice thickness varies from 5 to 7 inches. Use caution; check ice thickness and conditions often. Anglers were catching 7 to 9 inch bluegills while sorting through smaller fish.

**Willow Lake** (Harrison): There is 8 inches of ice. Anglers are catching a few bluegills. Fishing is better toward the evening.

**Farm Creek Lake** (Montgomery): Ice thickness varies from 6 to 8 inches. Fishing is excellent for bluegills.

**Anderson Area North Pond** (Montgomery): There is 8 inches of ice. Fishing is good for bluegills in front of dam.

**For more information on fishing in southwest Iowa, contact the regional office in Lewis at (712) 769-2587.**

### **Southeast**

**Mississippi River Pools 16 to 19:** Due to unsafe ice conditions, ice fishing on backwater areas of the Mississippi on Pools 16-19 is not recommended. Boat ramps are beginning to open up and anglers are reporting good fishing for sauger in the tailwaters of lock and dam 15 in Davenport.

**Lake Odessa** (Louisa): Unsafe ice.

**LAKE DARLING** (WASHINGTON): WARM WEATHER HAS MELTED THE ICE AROUND THE EDGES OF THE LAKE PLUS SNOWMELT HAS PUT UP TO A FOOT OF WATER ON SOME OF THE ICE. THIS EQUALS UNSAFE ICE.

**Lake Geode** (Henry): The ice at the south end is rotten and the stream at the north end is running full. Unsafe ice conditions.

**Lake Belva Deer** (Keokuk): Unsafe ice conditions. It is time to wait until spring to catch those big bluegills.

**Lake Rathbun** (Appanoose): Crappies have been hitting on minnows fished around underwater structure. The ice is starting to thaw around the edges so use caution.

**Lake Wapello** (Davis): Due to a spillway repair project and warmer temperatures, water is being discharged from the lake creating unsafe ice conditions. Use extreme caution.

**Lake Miami** (Monroe): Bluegills and crappies have been hitting on wax worms fished near the bottom. The ice is starting to thaw around the edges so use caution.

**Lake Sugema** (Van Buren): The ice is becoming soft and very slushy. Use extreme caution if venturing out.

**Lake Macbride** (Johnson): Fishing has been fair for crappies with the best fishing in the early morning and just before and after dark around the brush piles. Some decent bluegills have been caught, but sorting is required for sizeable fish.

**Otter Creek Lake** (Tama): Anglers continue to catch bluegill and crappie around the brush piles. Evening has been the best time to fish.

**Pleasant Creek** (Linn): Fishing continues to be fair for perch, bluegills, crappies and an occasional catfish. Best fishing areas have been near the dam, around the roadbed, and between the beach and main boat ramp areas. Some sorting is required for sizeable fish.

**Hannen Lake** (Benton): Bluegill fishing continues to be fair to good on jigs tipped with wax worms, with best fishing in the morning. Anglers are reminded that using minnows is prohibited.

**Farm ponds – Unsafe ice.** Most of the ponds have lost the first five or so feet of the ice around the edges. Warm weather this week probably will open some of the smaller ones up completely.

**For more information on fishing in southeast Iowa, call the regional office in Brighton at (319) 694-2430.**

### **Northeast**

**Mississippi River Pools 9 to 15:** There is still more than a foot of ice in most backwater areas of the Mississippi River, but warm weather and the snow cover has created variable ice conditions. Use caution when crossing sloughs and around the edges. Pool 9, The **Blackhawk Park** area has been good for bluegill and crappies. Lansing power plant open water area has been excellent fishing for rock bass using night crawlers. Pool 10, **Ambrogh Slough, Dark Slough** and **Methodist Lake** have been good fishing for crappies. **Bussey Lake**, in Pool 10, has been producing crappies in the weed beds along the dredge cuts. Good-sized bluegills are biting in **Sandbar Slough** and many smaller ones in the **Norwegian Lake** area. Pool 11, **Bertrom Lake** dredge cuts have been very good fishing for bluegill. Pool 12 fishing is spotty; anglers are catching a few crappies from **Fish Trap**. Pool 13, anglers have been catching fish in the lower portion **Browns Lake** and also in **Lainsville**. **Lower Sabula Lake** is producing a few catches of crappie and a few bluegills. Most are being caught in 3 to 6 feet of water. Pool 14, a few reports of crappie and bluegill being caught early in the morning. Fishing has slowed. A word of caution watch for spider cracks or weep holes where water is escaping below the ice. These spots can be unsafe.

**Big Woods Lake** (Black Hawk): Bluegills and crappie fishing is fair using a jig and wax worm.

Anglers are catching walleyes in the **Cedar River** (Black Hawk) down stream from the dam in Waterloo using jigs and minnows. Some anglers are gaining access to the open water below the dam by walking out on the ice. Use EXTREME CAUTION; ice conditions vary greatly!

**Lake Delhi** (Delaware): A variety of fish are hitting wax worms or minnows fished in the late afternoon hours. Anglers are encouraged to check ice conditions often.

**Trout streams:** The majority of streams are ice-free. The gradual snowmelt is allowing for good water clarity. Now is a great time of year to catch a memorable trout.

**For information on fishing in northeast Iowa, call the regional office in Manchester at (563) 927-3276.**

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